# THE LIFE OF CHRIST

## BOOK I

## HIS BIRTH AND EARLY YEARS

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(Translated from the Arabic)

CALL OF HOPE - STUTTGART - WEST-GERMANY

GLORY TO GOD
IN THE HIGHEST,
AND ON EARTH
**PEACE**
TO MEN ON WHOM
HIS FAVOR RESTS.
(LUKE 2:14)

Bible texts and quotes have been taken from the New King James Version which uses American forms and spelling.

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# ARISE, SHINE,

FOR YOUR LIGHT HAS COME,
AND THE GLORY OF THE LORD
RISES UPON YOU.

**SEE, DARKNESS COVERS THE EARTH**

**AND THICK DARKNESS**

**IS OVER THE PEOPLES, BUT**

# THE LORD

RISES UPON YOU AND

# HIS GLORY

APPEARS OVER YOU.
(ISAIAH 60:1-2).

# I

# INTRODUCTION

## *The Need For Christ*

With the passing of the years, the injustice and misery of man has increased, due to his drifting further and further away from perfection. Human philosophy has failed to help man attain perfection or to improve his condition. Socrates, the great Greek philosopher, said to his disciple Alcibiades, "I cannot show you how to obtain the highest good, for I do not know. However, I am convinced that the Creator is good. In his goodness he will send a teacher in due time to teach humanity how to obtain this good."

Experience had taught this philosopher that corrupt people, by nature, cannot reform what is base. An Arab poet has said:

> Can reform be expected from the corrupt?
> For honey is not to be found in the bitter apple!

Leaders of nations have set down rules to improve the condition of man. That is what Hammurabi, the Greek philosophers, the wise men of Egypt, the Roman lawmakers, the Persian Magi, the Brahmins of India, and many others have done;

yet, all their wisdom failed to accomplish what was needed. Although the Law of Moses is divine, it was unable to effect a complete change of man because its purpose was only to let man know his error and to urge him to strive after perfection. It was also to lead him to the source of all reformation. There was no other way for man to reach perfection except through the only means appointed by God: the Heavenly Teacher, the Son of his love, Jesus Christ, who brought what no human sage could ever bring. He not only brought a majestic and perfect law, but was himself perfect in thought, word, and deed. He himself fulfilled whatever he expected others to do. Consistency, both in word and deed, is what every other reformer has failed to achieve.

Our great need, therefore, is not for someone to point out the way to perfection, but for one who will lead and walk along with us; one whose example we can imitate, and in whose way we can follow. No perfect, holy person other than Jesus, the Son of Mary, has ever walked the earth.

What a great difference there is between teaching by word and teaching by example! Teaching by word is theoretical, while teaching by example is practical. Because Jesus taught both by word and example, he was the culmination of virtue in this corrupt world, giving it goodness, happiness and a standard for perfection. The important matter is finding out what Christ did for us, and what he taught. Then, it is important to study his life more fully in order to discover the way to personal change, and to find the happiness that we seek. Almost everything is prone to exaggeration, but we cannot over- emphasise the glories of Jesus Christ. The words of every eloquent man fall short when trying to describe the qualities of his perfect, noble life. Thus, the highest reward any man can expect is to be a means of leading people to Christ, the Shepherd and Bishop of souls, and the messenger of heavenly love. He alone enables us to achieve true perfection, to experience a free salvation, and to enjoy with him a holy, everlasting life in heaven's glory. One of the poets described our Lord Jesus Christ in this way:

Rise, oh singer,
sing our dear Redeemer's name.
Magnify, in mellow notes
This wonderful person;
He, of noble character
And exalted majesty;
Creator of all things,
His tenderness the life of all.
Everlasting, ever living,
He before the mountains was.
Holy and pure, clothed in majesty,
Beauteous Sun of Righteousness,

Shining Morning Star;
He alone is true perfection,
None can match him, none at all.

Christ read a prophecy concerning himself from the prophet Isaiah, which foretold his coming seven hundred years before it happened:

**The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord (Luke 4:18,19).**

The New Testament says the following about Christ:

**Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls. You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin (Hebrews 12:2-4).**

**For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps:... (1 Peter 2:21).**

Therefore, we say that we need Christ, at least for the following five reasons:

1. Christ is the Word of God in human form, the Only Begotten One who cannot appear except in the image of his Heavenly Father. In the Gospel, the word *love* describes him fully. In Christ, God showed divine, infinite love, without distinction as to creed, not only to those who loved him, but also to his enemies. From him, mankind inherited the principle of love for all - even one's enemies. He incorporated this principle in his teachings, confirmed it in his conduct, and announced that love is the fulfillment of the Law.

2. Christ is the one appointed by God since eternity. He was sent by God at the right time to announce God's unlimited and indescribable love, and to die on the Cross for the sins of mankind.

3. Christ is the Saviour who took our human nature willingly, so that he could empathise with other people and complete the work of Redemption.

4. Christ is an outstanding religious leader noted for his love. The success of his message in the world

today is the result of his self-sacrificial love and his real and constant presence with his people.

5. Christ is the subject of the Gospel, the greatest good news heard by human ears. It is the message of God's concern for the human race in time and for all eternity.

Some religious creeds stress the omnipotence of the god whom they worship, some his holiness, others his wisdom, still others his mercy. Christianity, while acknowledging all of these, stresses Jesus Christ's message: God's fatherly love to all mankind which seeks to turn all men back to him, even the worst sinners, and to save them from hell (John 3:16).

No one has the right to be called a Christian unless he lives by the principle of love for ALL people. A true Christian seeks to serve and sacrifice for others and looks out for the welfare of his neighbour.

* * *

## II

# THE PERSONALITY OF CHRIST

The greater the claims of a person, the more difficult it is for him to prove them, and the easier it is for others to see if they are false. Therefore, a wise person avoids false claims for fear he might fail and thus be exposed to scorn.

Christianity claims the most incredible things about its leader, Jesus. If these claims are true, then it is the supreme religion, and its leader is the prince of leaders. Proving the claims of Christianity calls for an examination of the life of Christ. He himself said: "You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles?" (Matthew 7:16). One can render a verdict as to Christ's true greatness by his words and deeds rather than by the descriptions of his friends or the criticism of his adversaries.

When Christ was a poor Galilean rabbi, his enemies, the Jewish religious leaders, arrested him and brought him to Pilate, the cruel Roman governor, asking for him to be crucified. After trying him, Pilate proclaimed Christ's innocence and told the accusers, "I do not find a fault in this Man" (Luke 23:4). They were so persistent, however, that the governor repeated the trial and this was his verdict:

**Then Pilate, when he had called together the chief priests, the rulers, and the people, said to them, "You have brought this Man to me, as one who misleads the people. And indeed, having examined Him in your presence, I have found no fault in this Man concerning those things of which you accuse Him; no, neither did Herod, for I sent you back to him; and indeed nothing worthy of death has been done by Him" (Luke 23:13-15).**

Pilate's wife had a dream that Jesus was innocent and she warned Pilate to have nothing to do with him (Matthew 27:19). Because of this, Pilate addressed the crowd three times, saying, "I have found no reason for death in Him" (Luke 23:22). At last, when he unwillingly yielded to the demands of the Jews, he delivered him to them to be crucified. However, he tried one last time to quiet his troubled conscience by washing his hands publicly, saying: "I am innocent of the blood of this just Person. You see to it" (Matthew 27:24).

When Pilate examined the case of Christ, he discovered that he was innocent. This conclusion, reached by Pilate at the end of Christ's earthly life, is essential to knowing the person whom Pilate and his wife described as innocent. It is also known that the entire civilised world supports them in this judgment. Jews, Muslims, pagans, and atheists are unanimous in declaring Jesus Christ to be a righteous and innocent man.

What is the logical explanation for the inconsistencies in the perceptions of the personality of Jesus Christ? How can we reconcile the judgment of the world on Christ's honesty and holiness with the following:

1. The claims that he made about himself.
2. The things he did.
3. The things that were said about him and done to him.

We all agree that to claim such extraordinary qualities for oneself, when one does not possess them, is outright lying, foolishness, or insanity! Naturally, we cannot accuse Christ of any of these things.

It is clear that the more virtuous the disciples and the prophets became, the more humbled they felt, because of their mistakes and shortcomings. Humility is among the highest virtues, and to recognise our own faults is very important. Morality heightens the sensitivity of one's conscience. For example, savages live quite comfortably in conditions that civilised people would consider filthy. People who are not so virtuous behave in a way that would cause an upright person to constantly ask for forgiveness. In the Bible, we find tender confessions and prayers for mercy by the greatest prophets and apostles such as Moses, Daniel, Peter, and Paul. This confirms their genuine goodness, for not one of them claimed to be perfect. But Christ is different in this respect from all the other virtuous people, and this difference requires a convincing explanation as well as an answer to the question, "Who is this Jesus?"

One remembers that those who declared that Jesus was perfect were those who accompanied him day and night -- for three whole years. They had come to know him intimately. They were not the kind who would cover up failures and faults, or keep quiet about them. On the contrary, while describing Christ's life and confirming the transcendence of his perfection, they mentioned their own lapses and shortcomings. These are adequate proofs of their sincerity, wisdom, and righteousness, and are reason enough to regard their testimonies concerning Christ with the utmost respect.

It is strange to find that Christianity has survived and blossomed amid strong and bitter opposition, both past and present. Its enemies wanted to demean, weaken, and destroy it. Since Herod tried to kill the Baby Jesus in Bethlehem, the enemies of Christianity -- driven by the same motives as Herod

-- have not stopped fighting the Christian Church and its teachings.

It is clear, to any thoughtful inquirer, that objections to the teachings and beliefs of Christianity started during apostolic times; they lie dormant and are then revived from generation to generation. Some of these criticisms were so ridiculous that they were refuted as soon as they met a clear rebuttal. Those who objected, including the opposition leaders, supposed they had destroyed the foundations of Christianity and boasted that its end was in sight. They claimed that its Holy Bible had been discredited and that people had rejected its most important teachings. But the Gospel teaching about the person of Christ has passed all tests and stood firm.

In his prayer, Christ said, "And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, Whom You have sent" (John 17:3). The Apostle Paul said: "But indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ" (Philippians 3:8). In his account of the Gospel, the Apostle John presented a most beautiful description of Christ, saying, "...these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name" (John 20:31).

How good it would be if all people would come to a personal faith in this unique Saviour who is also fully human. It is faith in the name of Christ which guarantees eternal life to its owner, about whom the Apostle Paul said:

> **Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.**
>
> **(Philippians 2:9-11)**

# III

# SOURCES OF THE STORY OF CHRIST

There are four sources for the facts about the life of Christ. These are the accounts of the Gospel written by Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. The word *Gospel* is a Greek word which, in Arabic, is translated *Injil*. It means "good news," and it was first used to mean the good news of salvation by Christ, in the sense of the teachings which enshrined it. It also described the life of Christ which embodied its message.

At first, the good news did not mean a book, but the message itself and its transmission. Before it was written, there was the oral Gospel from the mouths of the apostles and their disciples which had spread throughout the whole Roman Empire. The Lord Jesus Christ did not write an account of the Gospel; he did not even ask the disciples to write one. The Christian revelation is not primarily that of a book which came down literally on the disciples, but a revelation of a living person, Jesus Christ himself. The Apostle Paul said that God spoke to our ancestors in the past in many ways through the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us through his Son, who is the Word of God (Hebrews 1:1,2). The Apostle John, at the beginning of his first epistle, said that the apostles had announced to the world what they had heard, seen, and touched (1 John 1:1). Thus, they evangelised the world with the good news, the message of hope and salvation.

Christian leaders felt the need to record, for the Christian communities, the story of Christ as a reliable reference -- one which could not be twisted or corrupted. It was inevitable that the apostles would themselves begin to record their experiences since they were eyewitnesses who had received and experienced the message before passing it on to others. Thus, inspired by the Holy Spirit, certain men preserved and documented the four accounts of the Gospel which we now have in the Bible. There is only one Gospel -- the good news which Christ embodied, brought, and taught to us. The word *Gospel* only occurs in the singular throughout the Bible, although its transmission came to us via four accounts, all of which agree in essence and subject. Thus, the message is only one, but is documented by four writers: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Matthew and John were among the twelve disciples of Christ. Mark was the disciple of Peter, and Luke was the disciple of Paul. Mark and Luke wrote under the supervision of the apostles Peter and Paul.

Matthew addressed his narrative to his people, the Jews. He was interested especially in the Old Testament prophecies and how they were fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Mark wrote his story in Rome to the Christians of Roman background. He emphasised the power and greatness of Christ, which appealed to the Romans. Luke wrote his account to the Christians of Greek background. He stressed the will and the heart -- those elements through which man is perfected and by which God's love is revealed. His account of the Gospel has been called "the gospel of Mercy," and he wrote it after the spread of Christianity. He wanted to explain certain concepts and to address some questions and ideas which had crept into Christian teachings.

## *The Good News according to Matthew*

**"The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham."**
**(Matthew 1:1)**

Matthew, one of the twelve disciples of Christ, addressed his good news to the Jewish believers. He depicted Christ's earthly life, not as an independent event as such, but as an end and fulfillment of a historical and prophetic chain of events which had started long before. It is the book of the birth of Jesus Christ, Son of David, Son of Abraham. Matthew keeps referring to the Old

Testament to show how the prophecies have been fulfilled in Christ. Christ is the one who fulfilled all righteousness. In other words, he fulfilled the revealed Word of God found in the writings of Moses and the prophets. Matthew quotes seventy-five verses from the Old Testament which indicate that Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of all the divine promises to Abraham and his descendants. He came to lay the foundation of the kingdom of heaven, correcting the Jewish view that the coming Messiah would establish a political kingdom with Jerusalem as its centre.

## *The Good News according to Mark*

**"The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God" (Mark 1:1).**

Mark was not one of the twelve. His name is never mentioned in the four accounts of the Gospel. His Hebrew name was John and his Greek or Roman name, Mark. He was mentioned for the first time a few years after the ascension of Christ. He was the son of a woman called Mary, who also believed in Christ (Acts 12:12). She was the sister of Barnabas, the Cypriot Levite who became famous for his preaching. The Apostle Peter referred to Mark as "my son" (1 Peter 5:13). This is an indication that he accepted the faith through Peter. The writings of the early Christian fathers agree that Mark was a disciple of Peter and wrote his gospel under his direction. That is why Peter did not write an account of the Gospel in his own name.

The introduction to Mark reads: "the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God." It shows us that the story of Christ is the *Gospel*, a threefold "good news" which is apparent in the triune name in the introduction -- "Jesus Christ, the Son of God." This triune name is explained as follows:

JESUS: Christ was given this name by the angel Gabriel. It means "saviour." Nearer his birth, the angel confirmed this name, explaining its meaning: "...she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21). His salvation was to be an everlasting one.

CHRIST: Jesus is Christ because he is the Son of David, promised since Adam. God anointed him prophet, priest, and king. He was sent to the world, in fulfillment of the precious prophecies given to the patriarchs and the prophets in successive generations.

SON OF GOD: He is truly the Son of God, for he did not acquire this kingly name from man but by a divine revelation from an angel who proclaimed to the Virgin Mary that she would give birth to the Son of the Most High God. The Lord God would make him king, as his ancestor David had been (Luke 1:32). When Mary asked for confirmation of this seemingly impossible event, Gabriel repeated his declaration, thus settling the matter. In all of human history, there has been no other news more deserving of the title *Gospel* than that of the coming of Christ. He is indeed the Good News! No wonder the prophet Isaiah, who preceded Christ by some seven hundred years, said of him:

> **The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me,**
> **Because the Lord has anointed Me**
> **To preach good tidings to the poor;**
> **He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted,**
> **To proclaim liberty to the captives**
> **And the opening of the prison**
> **to those who are bound.**
> **To proclaim the acceptable year of**
> **the Lord.**
> **(Isaiah 61:1,2)**

It is no wonder that the angel, when announcing his birth to the shepherds near Bethlehem, said, "Do not be afraid, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people" (Luke 2:10). This brief introduction to the Gospel according to Mark summarises what we need to know about Jesus Christ.

## *The Good News according to Luke*

**Inasmuch as many have taken in hand to set in order a narrative of those things which are most surely believed among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word delivered them to us, it seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write to you an orderly account, most excellent Theophilus, that you may know the certainty of those things in which you were instructed (Luke 1:1-4).**

Like Mark, Luke the Evangelist is not mentioned in the four accounts of the Gospel. There are glimpses of his life in his second book, The Acts of the Apostles, showing that he accompanied the Apostle Paul on some of his journeys. We also know from one of the letters to the churches that he was a "beloved physician" (Colossians 4:14). He appears to be well-educated because his Greek language is rather refined. His introduction is a short message to his friend, Theophilus, a believer in Christ, where he shows that his purpose in writing this account of the Gospel was to confirm the new faith of Theophilus. He assures him that he took great care to investigate thoroughly the information

about Christ. He said: "...so that you may know the certainty of things in which you were instructed."
(Luke 1:4)

## *The Good News according to John*

**In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men (John 1:1-4).**

The fourth evangelist is the Apostle John. He was previously a disciple of John the Baptist, and one of the first two to follow Jesus Christ. He earned the title, "the disciple whom Jesus loved" (John 13:23). Although a fisherman, he was not poor, for his father Zebedee owned boats and had workers. His mother, Salome, accompanied Jesus and his followers, and supported them with her money. Christ favoured him in many ways. He reclined against Jesus during the Last Supper (John 13:23) and, before he died, Jesus committed Mary, his Mother, to John's care (John 19:27). His account of the Gospel overflows with love and kindness.

John wrote twenty or thirty years later than Matthew, Mark, and Luke. The humanity of Christ had become a well-established fact in the minds of the believers. There was no fear of it being shaken. However, since fanaticism is a human tendency, especially in religion, many had started to proclaim that Christ was only a man, and denied his deity. So, in his narrative, John found it necessary to include much about the divinity of Christ. He hoped to correct the error which had crept into the Church.

The prologue of the Gospel according to John is considered one of the grandest and most famous of Gospel sayings. It has a great impact on any lover of religion. Although Genesis 1:1 says that "in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth," the Apostle John writes about a beginning which supersedes this one, for he states: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made" (John 1:1-3).

**UNTO US A CHILD IS BORN,**
**UNTO US A SON IS GIVEN;**
**AND THE GOVERNMENT WILL BE**
**UPON HIS SHOULDER.**
**AND HIS NAME WILL BE CALLED**

WONDERFUL COUNSELOR,
MIGHTY GOD,
EVERLASTING FATHER,
PRINCE OF PEACE.

ISAIAH 9:6

(Prophecy about Christ by Isaiah, the Priest, 700 years before Jesus was born.)

## IV

# THE GENEALOGY OF JESUS CHRIST

The careful reader will notice a difference in the genealogy of Christ as Matthew and Luke recorded it. The genealogical record of Christ is omitted in the Gospel according to John because he went back to the eternal origin of Jesus. There is no real disagreement between the genealogies of Matthew and Luke, as we shall see.

### *The Genealogy of Jesus according to John*

John gave Christ a new title. He called him "the Word," a very appropriate description because words manifest a person's thinking. In this way, Jesus who appeared in the flesh, revealed God who sees but is unseen. Jesus Christ manifested, in behaviour and words, such divine attributes as power, wisdom, goodness, and holiness. It is therefore not surprising that one of his titles is *the Word*.

In Arabic, the term *kalima* (Greek: *logos*) is grammatically feminine. Yet, John applied it to Jesus, a male. (By using masculine pronouns and verbs in conjunction with the word, *kalima*, the usage of the word was changed to make it a title representing an actual person, Jesus Christ.)

John ended his prologue by affirming that God is unseen and is manifested by his only Son, the Word, who is fit for this task because he dwells in the bosom of God and knows him intimately. To make him manifest, he became a man and dwelt among us: "...the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14).

### *The Genealogy of Jesus according to Matthew*

**The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ,**
**the Son of David,**
**the Son of Abraham:**
**Abraham begot Isaac,**
**Isaac begot Jacob,**
**Jacob begot Judah and his brothers.**
**Judah begot Perez and Zerah by Tamar,**
**Perez begot Hezron,**
**and Hezron begot Ram,**
**Ram begot Amminadab,**
**Amminadab begot Nahshon,**
**Nahshon begot Salmon,**
**Salmon begot Boaz by Rahab,**
**Boaz begot Obed by Ruth,**
**Obed begot Jesse,**
**and Jesse begot David the king.**
**David the king begot Solomon**
**by her who had been the wife of Uriah,**

Solomon begot Rehoboam,
Rehoboam begot Abijah,
and Abijah begot Asa,
Asa begot Jehoshaphat,
Jehoshaphat begot Joram,
Joram begot Uzziah,
Uzziah begot Jotham,
Jotham begot Ahaz,
Ahaz begot Hezekiah,
Hezekiah begot Manasseh,
Manasseh begot Amon,
Amon begot Josiah.
Josiah begot Jeconiah and his brothers
about the time they were carried to Babylon.
And after they were brought to Babylon,
Jeconiah begot Shealtiel,
and Shealtiel begot Zerubbabel,
Zerubbabel begot Abiud,
Abiud begot Eliakim,
and Eliakim begot Azor.
Azor begot Zadok,
Zadok begot Achim,
and Achim begot Eliud.
Eliud begot Eleazar,
Eleazar begot Matthan,
and Matthan begot Jacob.
And Jacob begot Joseph the husband of Mary
of whom was born Jesus who is called Christ.

**So all the generations from Abraham to David, are fourteen generations, from David until the captivity in Babylon are fourteen generations, and from the captivity in Babylon until the Christ are fourteen generations.**

**(Matthew 1:1-17)**

Matthew, the writer of this genealogy of Christ, was originally a Jewish tax collector. His Hebrew name was Levi, his Greek name was Matthew, and his father was called Alphaeus. He served in the Roman government and therefore had a competent knowledge of financial and commercial matters. He was also a rich man.

In his introduction, Matthew begins with the words: "The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham: Abraham begot Isaac, Issac begot Jacob, and Jacob begot Judah and his brothers...." Then, he mentions forty men and women, the last being a man called Joseph, having taken Mary, of whom Jesus, called Christ, was born. While a casual reader might find this list boring, the wise reader realises its great importance, for it contains important insights into the human origins of this wonderful person, the one who became flesh and lived among us. He is the only person whose recorded genealogy goes back to Adam, the first man. He is also the only person whose worth, in addition to his divine essence, depends on his line of ancestry, for he is the Son of David from whom the expected Messiah was to come.

*The Genealogy of Jesus according to Luke*

**Now Jesus Himself began His ministry**
**at about thirty years of age, being**
**(as was supposed) the son of Joseph,**
**the son of Heli, the son of Matthat,**
**the son of Levi, the son of Melchi,**
**the son of Janna, the son of Joseph,**
**the son of Mattathiah, the son of Amos,**
**the son of Nahum, the son of Esli,**
**the son of Naggai, the son of Maath,**
**the son of Mattathiah, the son of Semei,**
**the son of Joseph, the son of Judah,**
**the son of Joannas, the son of Rhesa,**
**the son of Zerubbabel, the son of Shealtiel,**
**the son of Neri, the son of Melchi,**
**the son of Addi, the son of Cosam,**
**the son of Elmodam, the son of Er,**
**the son of Jose, the son of Eliezer,**
**the son of Jorim, the son of Matthat,**
**the son of Levi, the son of Simeon,**
**the son of Judah, the son of Joseph,**
**the son of Jonan, the son of Eliakim,**
**the son of Melea, the son of Menan,**
**the son of Mattathah, the son of Nathan,**
**the son of David, the son of Jesse**

**the son of Obed, the son of Boaz,**
**the son of Salmon, the son of Nahshon,**
**the son of Amminadab, the son of Ram,**
**the son of Hezron, the son of Perez,**
**the son of Judah, the son of Jacob,**
**the son of Isaac, the son of Abraham,**
**the son of Terah, the son of Nahor,**
**the son of Serug, the son of Reu,**
**the son of Peleg, the son of Eber,**
**the son of Shelah, the son of Cainan,**
**the son of Arphaxad, the son of Shem,**
**the son of Noah, the son of Lamech,**
**the son of Methuselah, the son of Enoch,**
**the son of Jared, the son of Mahalaleel,**
**the son of Cainan, the son of Enos,**
**the son of Seth, the son of Adam,**
**the son of God (Luke 3:23-38).**

The genealogy of Luke appears to differ somewhat from that of Matthew. We can say that the two agree that the last link is Joseph, husband of Mary, the mother of Jesus. Both also agree in the chain that runs from Abraham to David and in the names of Shealtiel and Zerubbabel of the Babylonian exile. However, they differ in a way which has intrigued the critics. For example, Matthew takes the descent of Jesus back to Abraham while Luke takes it back to Adam. Matthew follows the chain starting from Solomon, the son of David, while Luke follows it starting from

Nathan, another son of David. Matthew mentions that Joseph (the husband-to-be of Mary) is a son of Jacob while Luke makes him the son of Heli, the father of Mary (the Jews used to trace the line of genealogy through one's wife's father, as in the case of Berzalai in Ezra 2:61 and in Nehemiah 7:63). The chain from David to Joseph, in Matthew, is much shorter than in Luke; it is obvious that some links in the chain are omitted. This is because the words "son of" and "father of" are used in a broad sense, such as saying that Jesus is the Son of David, or the Son of Abraham. Matthew mentions only four links between Rahab and David covering the days of the Judges, a period of 450 years. Also, the genealogy in Luke concerns Mary while the other concerns Joseph; however, both are necessary.

These two accounts of the Gospel help clarify the divine origin of Christ. Matthew does not write that Joseph begot Jesus, but rather: "Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus who is called Christ." Luke begins his genealogical account of Christ by saying that it was supposed that Jesus was the son of Joseph.

Now, if anything in the two genealogies deserved attack or objection, the Jewish leaders would not have spared either from the start, especially as the genealogies go back to David, making Jesus Christ the coming Messiah. The silence of the Jews is proof of the reliability of the genealogies.

### *Lessons from the Genealogy*

One concludes from the mention of Ruth, the Moabite, that the poor and foreigners in Israel had a share in the royal, Messianic genealogy. The names of Rahab, a former prostitute, Tamar, and Bathsheba also indicate that sinners who repent have a place in this honourable list, irrespective of their past. Christ cares for the weak and forgives those who are far from righteous. "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick" (Matthew 9:12); "...for the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost."
(Luke 19:10)

The whole Gospel revolves around these inspired words of the Apostle John: "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us." Since the only source of the story of Christ is the Gospel and since the four accounts agree on his divinity, it is only fair to explain the events of his life in the light of his divine nature.

## V

# GABRIEL ANNOUNCES THE GOOD NEWS TO ZACHARIAS

There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judea, a certain priest named Zacharias, of the division of Abijah. His wife was of the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless. But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and they were both well advanced in years. So it was, that while he was serving as priest before God in the order of his division, according to the custom of the priesthood, his lot fell to burn incense when he went into the temple of the Lord. And the whole multitude of the people was praying outside at the hour of incense. Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing on the right side of the altar of incense. And when Zacharias saw him, he was troubled, and fear fell upon him. But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your prayer is heard; and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth. For he will be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink. He will also be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb. And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. He will also go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, 'to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children,' and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord." And Zacharias said to the angel, "How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is well advanced in years." And the angel answered and said to him, "I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God, and was sent to speak to you and bring you these glad tidings. But behold, you will be mute and not able to speak until the day these things take place, because you did not believe my words which will be fulfilled in their own time." And the people waited for Zacharias, and marveled that he lingered so long in the temple. But when he came out, he could not speak to them; and they perceived that he had seen a vision in the temple, for he beckoned to them and remained speechless. And so it was, as soon as the days of his service were completed, that he departed to his own house. Now after those days his wife Elizabeth conceived; and she hid herself five months, saying, "Thus the Lord has dealt with me, in the days when he looked on me, to take away my reproach among men" (Luke 1:5-25).

The appearance of the stars is sudden, unlike that of the sun which is heralded by signs of dawn. Thus, the great prophets, like the stars, appeared as a surprise, without any prediction or sign. The appearances of Abraham, Moses, David, or Elijah (with the exception of John the Baptist) were not preceded by prophecies. However, the coming of Christ -- to whom belongs many titles including "Sun of Righteousness" -- was not a surprise at all. The numerous prophecies, like a wonderful dawn, had already foretold his arrival. At the same time, outside the circle of this dawn, the moral and spiritual darkness had reached its darkest hour just before his appearance. This heavenly light came when the world needed it most and when righteous people longed for it.

The introductory prophecies deserve careful study; however, lack of space in this book does not permit this, so we shall be content with those prophecies that indicate that his coming was near at hand. There was no mention of angelic visitations for over five hundred years. When the Incarnation came closer, the appearances of the angels became more frequent and more glorious than at any other time in history since creation. This was to announce the imminent arrival of the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, clothed in human form, to his earthly kingdom. Concerning this event, the Bible states: "But when He again brings the firstborn into the world, He says: 'Let all the angels of God worship Him'" (Hebrews 1:6). This was he of whom Daniel, the prophet, said:

**Then to Him was given**
**dominion and glory and a kingdom,**
**That all peoples, nations,**
**and languages should serve Him.**
**His dominion**
**is an everlasting domionion,**
**Which shall not pass away,**
**And His kingdom the one**
**Which shall not be destroyed.**
**(Daniel 7:14)**

It was fitting that this king would be preceded by messengers from his heavenly throne. This message filled the heavens and the heavenly hosts trembled at its sound before it was heard on earth, ringing in the ears of the children of Adam.

It was the turn of Zacharias to burn incense on the golden altar in the Temple at Jerusalem. Zacharias entered behind the curtain in the course of performing his duty. He stood in front of the altar of incense, praying as the cloud of sweet-smelling smoke ascended to heaven. Suddenly, he saw the archangel Gabriel standing to the right of the altar. He was troubled and afraid, for however righteous or pious he was, he knew in himself that he was sinful. One finds that a sensitive conscience makes its possessor fearful in the presence of holiness, for it convicts him of the slightest lapse or fault, and for falling short of full perfection. Zacharias shrank from the approach of the angel who he thought could possibly have come to claim God's rights over his life or to punish him for his sins.

The last recorded angelic appearance, before that, was to Daniel. Gabriel appeared to him some five hundred years earlier. Daniel described the angel by saying: "His body was like beryl, his face like the appearance of lightning, his eyes like torches of fire, his arms and feet like burnished bronze in color, and the sound of his words like the voice of a multitude" (Daniel 10:6).

God now sent Gabriel to talk to Zacharias. This clearly shows heaven's interest in the coming of Christ to earth. On seeing him, Zacharias was afraid, but the angel calmed him down and said to him, "Fear not!" Then, he told him that both his and his wife's prayers had been answered. God would give them a child, despite the human impossibility owing to their old age.

Gabriel gave a name to the child that was to be born. He told Zacharias about the future of his son -- that he would be a joy for them and to many others. He would be great before men and God, since he would be filled with the Holy Spirit from conception. He would be dedicated to the Lord, chaste all his life, and would succeed greatly in the work which is the centre of heaven's interest on earth; namely, to call many back to the Lord their God.

He promised Zacharias something greater still: the boy would go before the promised Christ, fulfilling the prophecy which every Jew believed concerning how Elijah would come prior to the Lord, so as to prepare a people who were ready for him. More than once in olden times, an angel had foretold the birth of a child. This is the first announcement of a child who would herald the coming of someone much greater than himself, an indication of the superiority of Christ over all men.

Although Zacharias knew about the miracle of Abraham and Sarah, he did not believe the angel. He still believed it was impossible for his barren wife to become pregnant, especially through him, an elderly man. So, God made him mute for nine months, until he saw with his eyes and heard with his ears the reality of the words of Gabriel.

Because of Gabriel's unexpected visit, Zacharias was late in returning to the worshippers who were waiting for him to bless them before departing. They wondered about his delay behind the veil inside the

Temple. Their wonder increased when he came back to them, unable to talk. He did not give them the blessing, but used sign language, as best he could. They perceived that he had seen a vision.

Zacharias was loyal to his ministry. He did not apologise or discontinue it because of what happened to him or because he wanted to share the good news with his wife. He remained till his service was ended, and then he returned to his village.

One can imagine how worried Elizabeth must have been when a mute husband returned home! She was even more astonished when he wrote down his experience with the angel Gabriel for her. He probably warned her of unbelief, lest she should be punished as he had been.

Zacharias and his wife were preoccupied with the angel's news that their son would be the man to prepare the way of the Lord. No doubt, they asked: "When will he appear? When and how?" Soon they would know; not from Gabriel, but from a relative of Elizabeth, a woman who was to become the most famous and happiest of all women!

One cannot logically accept that the supreme miracle of the incarnation of Christ, the eternal Son, would take place without being accompanied and confirmed with other miracles. Thus, the annunciation to Zacharias, his punishment, and Elizabeth's miraculous pregnancy were all introductions to the birth of Christ, Son of Mary. These miracles helped people to believe in the greater miracle that would follow shortly after: the birth of Jesus by the Virgin Mary. By this divine birth, all the old prophecies were fulfilled and the numerous detailed symbols realised. These prophecies and symbols are applicable to no other person in human history! Furthermore, we can truthfully assert that Jesus of Nazareth is the Saviour whom the prophets of the Bible predicted would come. Whoever studies the Jewish Torah carefully will find that this inspired book speaks about the Messiah, not as an ordinary man, nor as one of the prophets, but as a divine person.

## VI

# GABRIEL ANNOUNCES THE GOOD NEWS TO MARY

Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And having come in, the angel said to her, "Rejoice, highly favored one, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women!" But when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and considered what manner of greeting this was. Then the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end." Then Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I do not know a man?" And the angel answered and said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God. Now indeed, Elizabeth your

**relative has also conceived a son in her old age; and this is now the sixth month for her who was called barren. For with God nothing will be impossible." Then Mary said, "Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her (Luke 1:26-38).**

Gabriel, the archangel, visited the Galilean priest Zacharias and announced to him the birth of a son by his barren wife, Elizabeth. He was an upright and respected leader among his people. What great person -- greater than this old priest -- would Gabriel visit next? A king? A very rich or powerful man? No! Rather, he would visit a poor, humble virgin, unprivileged among other virgins of her time, unmentioned, and of no importance at all were it not for this visit. Gabriel was sent to her to announce that God in his providence had chosen her to be the means by which the only Saviour would enter this world.

God gave the Virgin Mary the highest of all honours. That is why Gabriel addressed her, saying, "Rejoice, highly favored one, blessed are you among women!" (Luke 1:28). By this, God showed mankind that true greatness does not come from position, background, fine physique, or outstanding intellect, but only from a pure soul.

Most likely, the girl was troubled by the sight of the angel, for she was alone. She became perplexed when he addressed her by name. He repeated his greeting and added a piece of news she did not expect or dream of: she would become pregnant in a way more wonderful than her relative, Elizabeth. She would become pregnant by the Holy Spirit, while remaining a virgin. Her Son would not only be great, but would be called Son of God. Being one of the descendants of David, her Son would be his greatest successor and his reign would last forever.

It is possible that Mary, like many other girls of her day, dreamed of giving birth to the Messiah, especially since she was engaged to a righteous man who himself was a descendant of David. Thus, this much coveted privilege was coming to her in the framework of her engagement to Joseph.

When the angel announced to her that she would become pregnant immediately, even before she married Joseph, she was naturally troubled. She felt it necessary to protect her chastity and defend her honour, and she asked the angel how she could believe the words he had spoken to her. Her chastity, modesty, and humility were her crowning virtues.

God chose Mary among all the virgins of her people, after he had confirmed in her a qualification for this high standing. He gave her his grace to become the mother of the human nature of the Son of God, Jesus Christ. God always qualifies his chosen one's for whatever he delegates to them. He showered Mary with his continuous grace so as to make her fit to perform her new duties, for Gabriel answered her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God" (Luke 1:35).

The extraordinary answer of the angel did not clarify the strangeness of his announcement, nor did it make it understandable to human reason. Gabriel was content to assure her that the child's conception would take place supernaturally, in a way never known before or afterwards. He also added that the Son would be *holy*, an adjective never before applied to a human.

The reaction of Mary was different from that of Zacharias. She only asked for an explanation. Gabriel told her about the pregnancy of her cousin Elizabeth to reassure her that his words were true. He concluded by saying that nothing is impossible with God. Would it be hard for the one who had created heaven and earth from nothing to give a child to a virgin without the help of a human father?

Although the words of Gabriel were hard for Mary to accept, she surrendered and believed, saying, "I am the servant of the Lord." This attitude of total surrender to God is wisdom itself, whereas blind submission to man is ignorance and humiliation.

How great the joy of this chosen virgin must have been! Her hope and the hope of her people was at hand, and she was the vessel God had chosen to bring the Messiah to his people. Her joy must have been limitless.

Perfect joy, however, is not to be found in this world! There was bound to be some element of fear mixed with the joy in her pure heart. She must have dreaded the anger of her husband-to-be and his separation from her as soon as he discovered her secret. She had no way of proving her story, for no one would believe her. Furthermore, her upright and excellent character added another legitimate fear: she regarded herself unworthy of such an extraordinary privilege. She feared that she would not be able to carry out her motherly duties. No doubt, she redoubled her efforts to cast herself on the mercy of God to operate in her new situation in a way that neither she nor any other human could do alone.

* * *

**Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: After His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit. Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not wanting to make her a public example, was minded to put her away secretly. But while he thought about these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins." Now all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet saying: "Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel, which is translated "God with us." Then Joseph, being aroused from sleep, did as the angel of the Lord commanded him and took to him his wife, and did not know her till she had brought forth her firstborn Son. And he called His name JESUS (Matthew 1:18-25).**

What did Joseph think when he learned that his wife-to-be was pregnant? We do not know how Joseph came to know about this, but he wanted to believe the story despite its strangeness. At the same time, he had no doubts about the integrity of Mary from what he knew of her.

He, as her future husband, had to protect her against any disgrace. He would be wronging her, were he publicly to leave her. Besides, it would be the greatest of honours to have the Saviour born in his house. On the other hand, being a just man and, therefore, a careful follower of the divine Law with its holy commandments regarding honour and good reputation, he had to punish her accordingly. How great was his predicament and agitation! However, after thinking about it, his love and courtesy drove him to choose the lightest penalty, which was to divorce her quietly.

At this point, divine providence intervened. An angel (it may have been Gabriel) visited him during his sleep and disclosed the whole truth. This convinced Joseph that it would be better to wed Mary rather than to put her away. What he had thought was a disgrace would become, in reality, the greatest honour for both of them. This is often true of men of God who have to bear a certain offenses because of circumstances around them.

The angel repeated to him what he had already told Mary: the name of the child was to be *Jesus*. Normally, the father had the right to choose the name of the child, but Joseph also had to understand the will of God concerning this name. The name *Jesus* had to coincide with and confirm his special service.

The name *Jesus* is like *Joshua*; both are the same ancient and revered Jewish name meaning "Saviour." It is therefore one of the noblest names of humanity, for it denotes the highest work among men: saving them from their sins. The one named Jesus is the Great Physician, for he heals men from the deadly disease of Sin, a disease from which all mankind suffers.

The Jews used to speak to their children of the coming Messiah, of the tribe of Judah, and of the house of David who would deliver them from the calamities of the world, such as poverty, disease, toil, and humiliation, and from the power of their enemies. This expectation had been the cause of bloody revolts led by false messiahs, driven by delusions, personal ambitions, or greed. The results were always catastrophic to the nation. The words of the angel swept aside these base expectations, revealing the true function of the promised Messiah and his work which would be much greater than anything they had imagined. He would fulfill the prophecy of Isaiah that the Messiah would be born of a virgin and, by reason of his supernatural character, would have the title *Immanuel* which means "God with us" (Isaiah 7:14).

Joseph obeyed the words of the angel of the Lord and took Mary as his legitimate wife. He had no union with her until she gave birth to her first child. Accordingly, everyone assumed that Jesus was the son of Joseph as well as Mary, and in this way Joseph preserved his honour and that of his wife as well as the child's during the time that they lived in Nazareth. How fortunate Joseph was in choosing a spouse with a rich character, even though she had no material wealth. Because he obeyed the heavenly instruction -- despite the difficulty of not having tangible proof -- he believed God even as his ancestor Abraham had done, and it was credited to him as righteousness.

## *Mary Visits Elizabeth*

**Now Mary arose in those days and went into the hill country with haste, to a city of Judah and entered the house of Zacharias and greeted Elizabeth. And it happened, when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, that the babe leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. Then she spoke out with a loud voice and said, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! But why is this granted to me, that the mother**

**of my Lord should come to me? For indeed, as soon as the voice of your greeting sounded in my ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy. Blessed is she who believed, for there will be a fulfillment of those things which were told her from the Lord" (Luke 1:39-45).**

Mary paid a visit to Elizabeth to see for herself if what the angel had said was true about her being pregnant in her old age, and to confirm the truth of the good news delivered to her personally. In any case, she wanted to congratulate her cousin as well as share her new experiences with her.

The journey from Nazareth to the city of Judah took five days. Mary found Elizabeth in her sixth month of pregnancy. Now that the disgrace of barrenness had been removed, she was better thought of in the community. As soon as Mary greeted her, the child moved in her womb. This was a sign to her that the person who pronounced the greeting was the mother of the long-awaited Messiah. The Holy Spirit descended on her, enlightened her mind, and released her tongue. Then, she delivered a greeting similar in spirit to that which the angel had given Mary: "Blessed is the fruit of your womb!" Elizabeth congratulated Mary on the great faith she showed in accepting the message of the angel.

The fact that Elizabeth congratulated Mary shows her great humility. Her words were divinely inspired, for she said, "...why is this granted to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?" Elizabeth was not glorifying Mary, but her child whose divine merits she had recognised. After Elizabeth had finished her greeting, the Holy Spirit filled Mary too. "And Mary said:

**'My soul magnifies the Lord,**
**And my spirit has rejoiced**
**in God my Savior.**
**For He has regarded**
**the lowly state of His maidservant;**
**For behold, henceforth**
**all generations will call me blessed.**
**For He who is mighty**
**has done great things for me,**
**And holy is His name.**
**And His mercy is on those**
**who fear Him**
**From generation to generation.**
**He has shown strength**
**with His arm;**
**He has scattered the proud**
**in the imagination of their hearts.**
**He has put down the mighty**
**from their thrones,**
**And exalted the lowly.**
**He has filled the hungry**

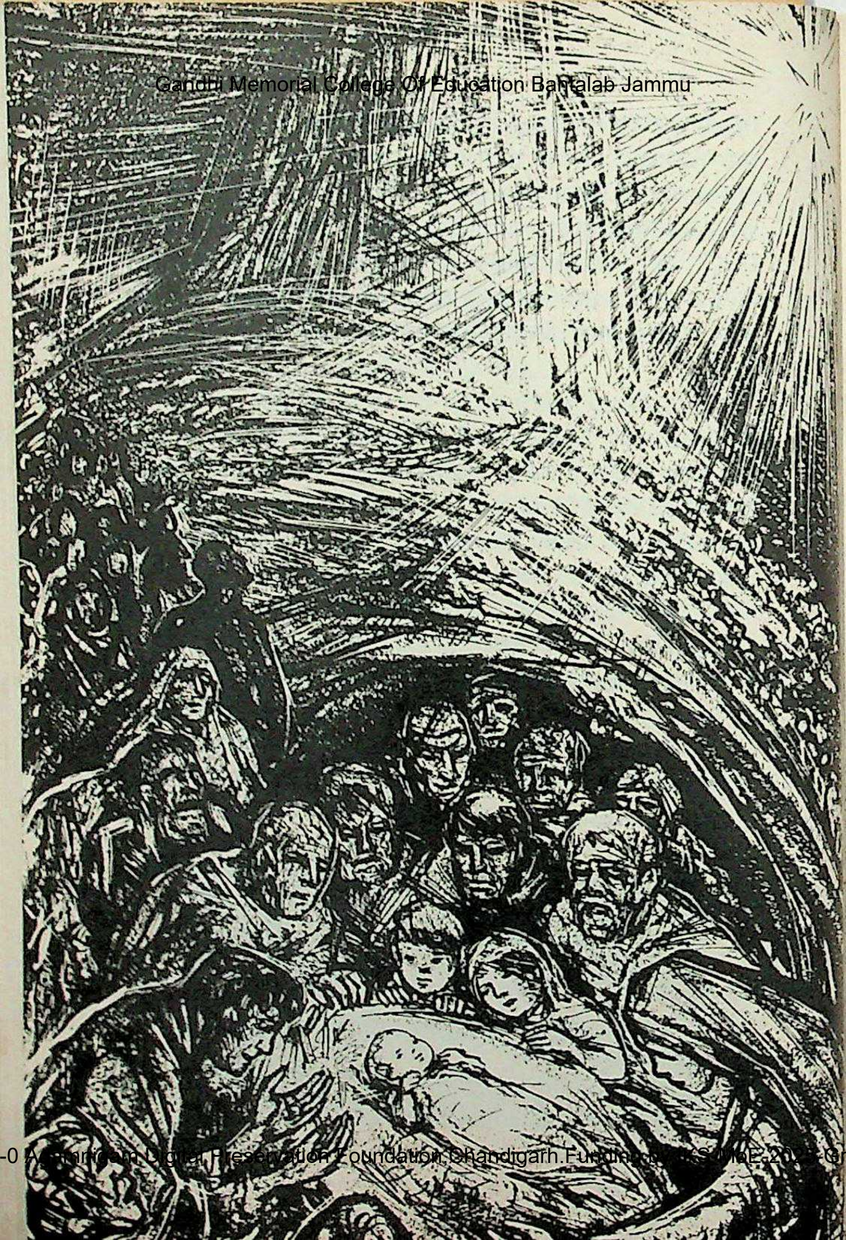
**with good things,**
**And the rich**
**He has sent away empty.**
**He has helped His servant Israel,**
**In remembrance of His mercy,**
**As He spoke to our fathers,**
**To Abraham and to his seed forever'"**
**(Luke 1:46-55).**

Mary sang one of the most beautiful and sublime of all Scriptural poems. It demonstrated the intelligence and spiritual sensitivity that God had given her. She reminds us of Miriam, sister of Moses, who rejoiced after the Israelites had crossed the Red Sea. The Virgin Mary used terms which are far from boastful, filled with humility. She felt her insignificance and knew that it would be God who would receive the glory in her situation. She also admitted that she, like others, needed a Saviour and that she would take refuge in God for her personal salvation. One cannot therefore expect her to save others, as some would believe.

Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord." Here she admits that she does not deserve the divine gift; yet, God chose her and elevated her to the hightest state ever granted to a human, and she was the first to admit this gracious dealing, for she added, "...He has regarded the lowly state of his maidservant." These words prove the greatness of Mary. She had never performed a miracle, her name was not often mentioned, she did not make any important statements after this event and no special honour was addressed to her. Even after the resurrection of Christ, the Scriptures hardly mention her. She was mentioned casually as one of the 120 disciples who met in the Upper Room for prayer.

We should learn from the self-denial of Mary. Even in her moment of greatest glory, she said, "...holy is his name." She thought only of God, happy at what he did. She proclaimed that he is not partial in his dealings with people. He works only according to his divine thought which is unlike the thoughts of man. He lifts up the lowly and humbles the proud. He refuses those who believe they deserve his special attention and accepts those who are counted as undeserving. The Christian Church rightly takes pride in Mary's *Magnificat* (the name of her song) and considers it to be a most precious evangelic hymn.

MY SOUL MAGNIFIES
THE LORD
AND MY SPIRIT HAS REJOICED
IN GOD MY SAVIOR
LUKE 1:46-47



## VII

# THE BIRTH OF CHRIST

**And it came to pass in those days that a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. This census first took place while Quirinius was governing Syria. So all went to be registered, everyone to his own city. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be registered with Mary, his betrothed wife, who was with child. So it was, that while they were there, the days were completed for her to be delivered. And she brought forth her firstborn Son, and wrapped Him in swaddling cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn (Luke 2:1-7).**

Mary stayed with Joseph's family for the duration of her pregnancy. When her delivery was close, she was still living in her hometown. However, Micah had prophesied some 700 years earlier that the Messiah was to be born in Bethlehem, some distance away from Nazareth (Micah 5:2); and the prophet Isaiah said: "Search from the book of the Lord, and read: Not one of these shall fail; not one shall lack her mate. For My mouth has commanded it, and His Spirit has gathered them" (Isaiah 34:16). Christ later said, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away" (Matthew 24:35). But what reason would be sufficient to impel Joseph and Mary to travel from Nazareth to Bethlehem, a trip of four or five days, at the beginning of winter, with Mary just about to give birth?

God, in fulfilling his will, uses not only angels but kings! Did not Solomon write: "The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord, like the rivers of water; He turns it wherever He wishes" (Proverbs 21:1)? God used the mighty Roman Emperor to order a general census. With compliance to Jewish custom in Palestine, he permitted them to register for this census on the basis of tribal and family origin, regardless of where they happened to be living at that time; and since both Joseph and Mary were of the line of David, they had to register in Bethlehem, the city of David.

## *The Birth in Bethlehem*

The Jews were dispersed all over the world during the thousand years from David to Christ. At the time of this census, all those, originally from Bethlehem, living in the Syrian province of the Roman Empire returned to their hometown. Among them were Joseph and Mary. The area became so crowded that there was no place for them to stay, and no one invited them into their home because of their apparent poverty. Also, the young couple was Galilean and the Judeans despised these people; so, they had to spend the night with some animals near one of the inns.

Mary gave birth to her child that night and she placed him in a manger. What greater poverty could there be? But it was in accordance with the divine plan for the Incarnation which demonstrated the wonderful love that led God to become a man in order to save sinners.

At that time, everyone knew of the census which brought many to Bethlehem, whereas only a few knew of the birth of the child. Today, the tables have been turned; all would have forgotten the census of Caesar, except for its connection with the birth of Christ, whereas many people hurry to visit Bethlehem, the birthplace of Jesus.

In reflecting on the manger, we can ask, "Is that poor child the same one who, after two thousand years, is still the object of worship and adoration of some of the great monarchs, wealthy people, and famous scholars of the world?" They are proud to kneel before his Cross, to belong to him, and to obey his teachings.

It is true to say that Jesus was the "second Adam," coming into the world without a human father, free from sin, to reverse what the first Adam had done by his fall (1 Corinthians 15: 45-49). He also came to renew a spiritual generation and to regain paradise for our wretched world.

### *The Angels Announce the News to the Shepherds*

**Now there were in the same country shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. And behold, an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were greatly afraid. Then the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger." And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying:**

**GLORY TO GOD IN THE HIGHEST,**
**AND ON EARTH PEACE,**
**GOOD WILL TOWARD MEN!**

**So it was, when the angels had gone away from them into heaven, that the shepherds said to one another, "Let us now go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has come to pass, which the Lord has made known to us." And they came with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the Babe lying in a manger. Now when they had seen Him, they made widely known the saying which was told them concerning this Child. And all those who heard it marveled at those things which were told them by the shepherds. But Mary kept all these things and pondered them in her heart. Then the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told them" (Luke 2:8-20).**

The birth of Christ was accompanied with many heavenly events, and great heavenly activity was observed. It was the only recorded time that God sent a visible legion of angels to earth and that singing was heard in the heavens.

Who were these people who had this privilege of seeing the angels and hearing their song? They were not the rich nor the educated; neither were King Herod nor the High Priest involved. Rather, it was poor people whom God chose, similar in their earthly circumstances to the newborn child; this served to emphasise the humility which marked the coming down of God in order to save mankind.

At the creation of the world, the morning stars sang together (Job 38:7), but there was no human ear to hear them. However, when the foundation and cornerstone of redemption were laid (the incarnate, eternal Son of God), a song was heard over the plains of Bethlehem. It was the adoration of the angels of God ringing in the ears of some shepherds who were keeping watch over their flocks by night.

When the glory of God shone around them, they were afraid, but the angel told them, "Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy." This was greater news than Zacharias and Mary had heard; it had actually taken place and all of God's people would be blessed by it.

The angel told the shepherds the same thing he had said to Mary and Joseph when he called the babe "Saviour." Now he told the shepherds, "For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior...." He explained to them that this Saviour was from the city of David; therefore, he was one of David's descendants. He was also the long-awaited Messiah and Lord, not a mere man. Then, they were given a sign to enable them to recognise him when they saw him.

As soon as the angel finished these words, an army of angels appeared to confirm this announcement. They were glorifying God and their task was not to announce a new message but to repeat the first one and confirm it: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men." This marvellous statement agrees, in spirit, with the words of the Apostle Paul: "... the kingdom of God is not food and drink, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Romans 14:17).

Because heavenly beings do not remain with humans, however much people may desire their presence, these angels returned to heaven. As a result of their visit, the shepherds hurried to the town, according to the directions given them. They took in with their eyes the glory and humility of the Baby Jesus. Thus, they became eye-witnessess of the angelic visit and of the reality of the child's origin which was not obvious from his external circumstances. Who could prevent such humble folk from visiting Christ's birthplace? No guards were there as in worldly places! Had Jesus been born in a royal palace, these poor shepherds would never have had this great honour. They hurried to look and saw exactly what the angels had described. When they related their vision to Mary, Joseph, and the others, they were surprised. As for Mary, the happy mother, this news was very important because it confirmed what the angel had told her concerning her wonderful child.

The shepherds returned to their flocks, praising God as the angels had done before. They were the first to spread the news of the birth of the Saviour, the Shepherd of souls and the great Head of the Church.

One can imagine that those shepherds were among the pious who were poor; they neglected many of the religious ceremonies, some of which were burdensome. It may well be that they took care of the lambs to be presented as holy sacrifices in the Temple service in Jerusalem. Here we see a tender relation between the sheep being offered for the Temple and this new babe, whom John the Baptist called "the Lamb of God" (John 1:29), and to whom the Apostle John referred as a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain. (Revelation 5:6)

## *The Circumcision*

**"And when eight days were completed for the circumcision of the Child, His name was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb. Now when the days of her purification according to the law of Moses were completed, they brought Him to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord (as it is written in the**

**law of the Lord, "Every male who opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord"), and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the law of the Lord, "A pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons" (Luke 2:21-24).**

On his eighth day of life on earth, the Baby Jesus was circumcised, as decreed by God to Abraham, to signify the covenant sign of God's special people. This occasion was one of many others he followed when he, as the founder of the New Covenant, submitted to the ordinances of the Old Covenant in order to link in his person the two, Old and New. In the same way, he united in himself the two natures, Creator and created.

### *Simeon Sees God's Salvation*

**And behold, there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon, and this man was just and devout, waiting for the Consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. So he came by the Spirit into the temple. And when the parents brought in the Child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the law, he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said:**

**"Lord, now You are letting**
**Your servant depart in peace,**
**According to Your word;**
**For my eyes have seen Your salvation**
**Which You have prepared before**
**the face of all peoples,**
**A light to bring revelation**
**to the Gentiles,**
**And the glory of Your people**
**Israel."**

**And Joseph and His mother marveled at those things which were spoken of Him. Then Simeon blessed them, and said to Mary His mother, "Behold, this Child is destined for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign which will be spoken against (yes, a sword will pierce through your own soul also), that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.**

**(Luke 2:25-35)**

Joseph and Mary took Christ to the Temple in Jerusalem according to the Law. This visit of the Lord of the Temple to the Temple of the Lord did not pass without events confirming the signs and miracles which preceded it. Simeon, the godly old man, filled with the Holy Spirit, had received a revelation that he would not die before seeing the Messiah, the Saviour of the world. Accordingly, that day he felt the Spirit leading him to the Temple. He went there and met Joseph, Mary, and the baby whom he recognised as the Blessed One. He took him up in his arms, as if presenting him to God and blessed the Lord, saying, "...now You are letting Your servant depart in peace, according to Your word; for my eyes have seen Your salvation..." In concluding his prayer, he signified that this salvation was to be for all people, for he said, "...a light to bring revelation to the Gentiles...."

When Mary and Joseph showed astonishment at Simeon's words which showed that he knew the rank of the child, Simeon blessed them, as an older person to a younger. Then, he revealed to Mary a deep and important secret pertaining to the person and work of Christ; namely, that as a Saviour he would lift up many and be the downfall of many. He would also be the subject of much opposition and persecution and would reveal the inner thoughts of man. Finally, she, as his mother, would have her share of his suffering, which would be likened to a sword piercing her heart.

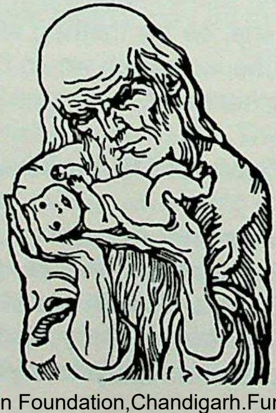
## *A Prophetess Bears Witness*

**Now there was one, Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, and had lived with a husband seven years from her virginity; and this woman was a widow of about eighty-four years, who did**

**not depart from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day. And coming in that instant she gave thanks to the Lord, and spoke of Him to all those who looked for redemption in Jerusalem (Luke 2:36-38).**

After Simeon had spoken, the old prophetess, Anna, came forward too, praising the Lord. Thus, she became the first recorded woman who believed in Christ after his birth, as well as the first of that army of honourable women who have served Christ down through the ages.

After this visit to the Temple, the family of three returned to Bethlehem, the city of their forefathers. By that time, the crowds which had come for the census had left, and so they were able to find a more suitable place to stay than with the animals.



## VIII

# THE MAGI VISIT THE BABY JESUS

Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, saying, "Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him." When Herod the king heard these things, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. And when he gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. So they said to him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it is written by the prophet:

'But you, Bethlehem,
in the land of Judah,
Are not the least among
the rulers of Judah;
For out you you shall come
a Ruler
Who will shepherd My people
Israel.'"

Then Herod, when he had secretly called the wise men, determined from them what time the star appeared. And he sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search diligently for the young Child, and when you have found Him, bring back word to me, that I may come and worship Him also." When they heard the king, they departed; and behold, the star which they had seen in the East went before them, till it came and stood over where the young Child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy. And when they had come into the house, they saw the young Child with Mary His mother, and fell down and worshiped Him. And when they had opened their treasures, they presented gifts to Him: gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Then, being divinely warned in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed for their own country another way.

(Matthew 2:1-12)

At the dawn of human history, Satan could not bear to see our first parents pure and happy in the garden of Eden, so he tricked them and dragged them down with their descendants into the bondage of Sin. Could he keep quiet at the birth of the "Second Adam," one immeasurably greater than the first? Wasn't this his invincible enemy about whom the Apostle John said: "...For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil" (I John 3:8). Truly, it would have been impossible for the Devil to keep quiet at that time; there was bound to be a new commotion in hell!

Satan did not need a messenger from the spirit world to execute his will in destroying this unique babe, for the leaders of the nation then were in his grip, and he could use them, at will, to do his destructive bidding. Herod, the bloody oppressor, was a very evil man who was a willing tool in the hands of the Devil.

One day towards the end of winter, a great disturbance occurred in Jerusalem and in the royal palace, due to the visit of some strangers from the East. They were called Magi, and it is most probable that they were persons of learning and high position. We are not told from where they came, but it was most likely Persia, India, or Arabia. We are not told their number either, though the commonly held view is three because three kinds of gifts for the babe are mentioned. Some regard them as having represented the three branches of mankind which stemmed from the three sons of Noah: Shem, Ham, and Japheth; others think that they may also have represented youth, maturity, and old age.

Most likely, they were students of astronomy and had heard of the coming Messiah from the Jews scattered throughout the world. They were typical of many heathen of their day who expected the appearance of a great person in the land of the Jews.

The people of Jerusalem were accustomed to strangers visiting their city, many of them from the Diaspora (the dispersion of the Jews throughout the world). Their country was popular for tourism and commerce for Jews and Gentiles alike. However, the arrival of these Magi caused a public disturbance because of the purpose of their visit and their question. They asked: "Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? We saw his star in the East and have come to worship Him."

This question aroused great fear in the hearts of those who heard it. They were afraid of the reaction of wicked King Herod at the prospect of a new king taking his place. No one knew who would be attacked when this king became angry. He had his spies everywhere, reporting to him anything likely to affect his interests. So, when the news of the visit of the Magi reached him, he was perturbed and feared for his life and his throne. After Herod asked of the chief priests and scribes where the Messiah would be born, they quoted to him from Micah, the prophet:

**"But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah,**
**Though you are little**

**among the thousands of Judah,**
**Yet out of you shall come forth to Me**
**The One to be ruler in Israel,**
**Whose goings forth have been from of old,**
**From everlasting."**
**(Micah 5:2)**

No doubt, Herod invited the Magi to his palace and honoured them -- despite his great agitation -- in order to find out from them the time when the star had appeared. We believe that he would have insulted, persecuted, and even killed them, for his sly nature drove him to try to trick them into helping him destroy the newborn babe. Concealing his anger, he told them to go to Bethlehem to find out all they could about the babe, and then he asked them to come back and report to him. He added cunningly, "...that I may come and worship Him also." He figured that in a day or two he would have the necessary information to proceed to Bethlehem and kill the boy; and maybe the Magi also for troubling him!

We would have liked to know what the Magi thought when, upon arriving in Jerusalem, the Jewish capital, they found that no one from the palace residents to the poorest man in the street knew about the birth of the glorious king. Why did they not turn back and head for home? Why did they not believe that perhaps their star had led them astray? Maybe they took comfort from the words of Herod that he too wanted to go and worship the newborn child; perhaps this revived their spirits. So they went, ready to comply with Herod's wishes after thanking him for his hospitality.

On their way to Bethlehem, they again saw the star leading them on and then stopping over the place where the child was. They were overjoyed! The star had originally pointed them to Jerusalem, though it did not direct them there. Now that it reappeared and brought them to their destination, they were happy.

Since nothing in the outward appearance of the family or the child indicated his miraculous and heavenly origin, the parents may not have revealed their secret to the people of Bethlehem. Therefore, it is unlikely that the Magi could have found their way to the child without the guidance of the star. When they entered the house, they worshipped the child and presented him with their gifts. The myrrh was in keeping with his prophetic standing, the incense denoted his priestly office, while the gold befitted his kingly stature.

Astronomers have studied the phenomenon of this star. They have investigated the dates of rare star appearances to try and pinpoint this one. It was discovered that, about the time of the birth of Jesus, some planets were conjoined; something which only happens once in hundreds of years. This has led some to think that this phenomenon is what led the Magi to Bethlehem. It was also known that an exceptionally bright star appeared at that time; it remained for a short while, then vanished. This has lead others to believe that this was the one pointing the way to Bethlehem. Still, others have theorised that it was a comet which only appeared once, unlike the others which have a small orbit and which reappear at known intervals. But no one knows for certain the nature of this star.

When the Magi saw the child whose star they had first seen in the East, they found a new light surpassing that of any of the constellations they had observed in pursuit of their basic interest in religion. Moreover, they were advised in a dream not to return to Herod, and so they took another road back to their country.

### *The Flight into Egypt*

**Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, saying, "Arise, take the young Child and His mother, flee to Egypt, and stay there until I bring you word; for Herod will seek the young Child to destroy Him." When he arose, he took the young Child and his mother by night and**

**departed for Egypt, and was there until the death of Herod, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying, "Out of Egypt I called My Son."**

**(Matthew 2:13-15)**

The Gospel according to Matthew says that as soon as the Magi left, the angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a second dream to tell him to take the child and his mother, escape to Egypt, and remain there until told to return. Joseph, realising the danger the child was in, obeyed this order and left for Egypt immediately.

No doubt, the inhabitants of Bethlehem began to respect the Holy Family as a result of the visit of the Magi whose view was that this was the new king of Israel. Maybe they also brought him gifts of significant value. Without the valuable presents given to the child, Joseph could not have afforded the expenses of the long trip to Egypt. These arrived as a beautiful proof of the awesome providence of God when there was a need to fulfill his holy will.

### *The Slaughter of Bethlehem's Children*

**Then Herod, when he saw that he was deceived by the wise men, was exceedingly angry; and he sent forth and put to death all the**

**male children who were in Bethlehem and in all its districts, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had determined from the wise men. Then was fulfilled what was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet, saying:**

**"A voice was heard in Ramah,**
**Lamentation, weeping,**
**and great mourning,**
**Rachel weeping**
**for her children**
**Refusing to be comforted,**
**because they were no more."**
**(Matthew 2:16-18)**

If we try to imagine what happened in the palace of Herod after the Magi had left, we can see him waiting impatiently for their return in order to decide what to do with the child. But the Magi did not return. When the time agreed upon for them to report back to him had passed, he must have sent a messenger after them. When he discovered that the Magi had tricked him, he was very angry at having missed his opportunity to locate the child.

He tried to find out from the townspeople which house had been visited by the Magi, but all they would tell him was that the family was Galilean and that they had departed in an unknown direction. This made him even more angry because he suspected that they were hiding something from him in the hope of saving their own children. He determined to destroy the child by any means and wanted to punish the people of Bethlehem for their deception and possible conspiracy with the Magi. Thus, he sent his men to kill all the boys two years and under in Bethlehem and its suburbs, just to make sure that no one would escape.

Matthew sees in this horrible Herodian atrocity a fulfillment of the prophecy of Jeremiah: "A voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation and bitter weeping..." (Jeremiah 31:15). Because these children were slaughtered because of Christ, some have considered them the first of the Christian martyrs.

### *Return to Nazareth*

**But when Herod was dead, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, saying, "Arise, take the young Child and His mother, and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the young Child's life are dead." Then he arose, took the young Child and His mother, and came into the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea instead of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. And being warned by God in a dream, he turned aside into the region of**

**Galilee. And he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, "He shall be called a Nazarene" (Matthew 2:19-23).**

It wasn't long before the bloody and wicked tyrant, Herod, received his just reward. He died in his palace in Jericho. One can imagine just how troubled his conscience must have been when he died. He thought that, by killing the infants of Bethlehem, he would live on, for the boy who had threatened his throne was dead. But later, Herod himself was in his grave, while Jesus was alive and safe. Since that time, the fame and honour of Christ, the perfect man, has been steadily increasing right up to the present day.

The stay of the Holy Family in Egypt was brief, for an angel appeared to Joseph in a dream, telling him to take the boy and his mother and return to the land of Israel since the one who sought to kill the child was dead. Joseph immediately obeyed.

We imagine that Joseph and Mary wanted to settle in Bethlehem, the town of their forefathers, the beautiful and honoured city of David. It was close to the Temple of the Lord in Jerusalem and also to the reputable religious schools. Here they hoped to bring the child up as heir to the throne of David. But since Archelaus, the son of Herod, ruled in his father's place, Joseph feared that he might harm the child Jesus. This king, after a good start, turned out to be just as cruel as his father, Herod. Although he had some hesitation, Joseph went to live in Nazareth as a result of another heavenly vision. Matthew sees in this decision yet another fulfillment of prophecy: "He shall be called a Nazarene" (Matthew 2:23).

## *A Unique Childhood*

The childhood of Jesus was unique in many ways: the timing of his birth, the age-old prophecies, the earthly and heavenly events and manifestations, and the extraordinary utterances which accompanied it.

The announcements miraculously fulfilled Old Testament prophecies in minute detail, with the angels proclaiming the glad tidings about to happen, followed by the unusual testimonies and songs of Elizabeth, Zacharias, and Mary.

Many extraordinary events happened before the birth of Jesus: the appearance of the angel to Zacharias and his temporary muteness, the extraordinary pregnancy of his wife Elizabeth, the orders given to Joseph in dreams, the timing of the imperial census, Joseph's ancestral home being Bethlehem (the prophesied place of the Messiah's birth), the appearance of the angels to the shepherds, the visit of the Magi from the Orient, and the presentation in the Temple.

All creation participated in welcoming Christ. The angels represented the heavenly creatures, the priest represented the clergy, the shepherds represented the poor, Mary and Elizabeth represented the young and the old, Simeon represented the pious Jews, Anna represented the prophets, the star in the East represented creation, and the Magi, represented the rich, noble, and wise Gentiles.

The timing of the birth of Christ fulfilled Old Testament prophecies, and the Apostle Paul said: "But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law" (Galatians 4:4). Jesus, the Prince of Peace, came at a unique time of peace in history. Transportation was easy and secure all over the Roman Empire, which made the spreading of the Good News by the apostles relatively easy. Under Roman law, there was freedom of religion. Greek language and culture was widespread over the whole area. All of this made communication even simpler, especially as the Jews had already translated the Scriptures from Hebrew to Greek.

The birth of the Saviour coincided with a period when morals were at their lowest in order to highlight the need of mankind for a saviour who would bring adequate redemption with sufficient authority to save all. The hearts of the few pious Jews had started to despair. The Jewish people were scattered over the face of the earth, expecting and proclaiming the coming Saviour. They were still the people who clung to the only God, thus giving the apostles of Jesus a wide opportunity to begin with their evangelisation, and then go on to the heathen.

All the conditions were ripe for the spread of the Gospel, starting with the Jews and extending to the evangelisation of the pagans. To some extent, Roman rule initially protected the young Church from the fanaticism of the Jews who wanted to kill Christianity the way they had its founder.

In view of all the foregoing, is it any wonder that Mark begins his account of the Gospel with the words, "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God"?

# IX

# THE CHILDHOOD OF JESUS

It is a mystery that the four accounts of the Gospel do not mention anything about the life of Christ from his birth until his twelfth year. The story resumes again when he began his public ministry at the age of thirty, teaching, and performing miracles.

How we would like to be able to read about one thing Jesus did or said during his childhood! The divine revelation kept these years hidden until he reached the age of twelve. We call these "the hidden years."

We can speculate that he lived as a typical Jewish boy. He kept the Mosaic Law, he went to school with his peers, and was outstanding in his lessons and behaviour. He also experienced the temptations of his fellow students because he too was tempted like them and could identify with them; yet, he was without Sin.

## *At the Age of Twelve*

When Jesus was twelve years old, he visited the Temple in Jerusalem in the company of Mary and Joseph. Following this incident, eighteen years elapsed about which the divine revelation is completely silent. How is one to interpret this strange silence that is present in all four accounts of the Gospel unless it was definitely prompted by the Spirit who inspired these Scriptures? Some Christians during the Dark Ages did not like this silence. They started to invent stories and wrote fictitious gospels and accounts of what took place during this period, according to their whims and imaginations. They thought that this would add more honour to the name of Christ. In fact, these fabrications only reflect the foolishness of their efforts.

Yet, the following question remains: Why this silence, despite the access to information which was available at that time? In reply, one can say that the events of Christ's early childhood showed essential features of his being Saviour. It was therefore necessary for these features to be veiled sufficiently long for the display of his true humanity. Moreover, his divinity was veiled from his people during his thirty years of preparation until he was manifested for service. Then, the signs of his divinity resurfaced for the remainder of his earthly life.

The silence is a strong proof against the error of thinking that the greatest work of Christ was to be an example for people to follow. If this were true, it would have been necessary for the apostles to have written down all his deeds and words during the entire period when he lived the normal life of a carpenter in Nazareth.

The purpose of those who wrote the accounts of the Gospel was not to document an historical biography. Rather, it was to witness of Christ as a reformer and a Saviour. That is why they were content to record the history of his life, dealing primarily with his public ministry. However, the details of his earthly life, which they omitted, would doubtless have attracted much public interest had they been recorded for us.

Although Nazareth was a comparatively humble town, it was the perfect place for Jesus to live. Groups of priests made Nazareth the place of meeting from where they travelled to the Temple in Jerusalem. The ones who could not make the journey used to spend their week of service in Nazareth, performing religious duties there. Jesus must have observed them and learned from them. Nazareth was also on the main caravan routes between Pheonecia to Egypt and between the Mediterranean Sea and the interior. This gave Jesus an opportunity to observe different cultural trends and customs. By living in a poor village like Nazareth, Jesus was nurtured in the virtues of humility and religious simplicity, for he was far removed from the centres of Jewish religious life in

Jerusalem where hypocrisy, sophistication, and traditionalism prevailed. These characteristics stifled true piety and choked the religious spirit due to excessive adherence to the letter of the Law. In fact, this would be the place where Christ would later express strong opinions about some of these issues, even judging the leaders with stinging words.

During the boyhood years of Jesus, his divine origin tended to fade from the minds of his parents. They had come to regard him as only human, for his life as a boy was basically the same as that of most others his own age. That was probably a good thing because otherwise he would have missed a variety of normal human experiences, especially if his parents felt bound to obey him, which would have been awkward while bringing him up. As it was, he mingled normally with his contemporaries, sharing in their experiences and trials until his public life started.

We do not doubt that he, as a boy, was full of warmth, concern, and pity for the suffering of others. For this reason, one is astonished at the patience and emotional restraint he must have suffered during those private years in Nazareth while awaiting the start of his life's service for which he had come down from heaven.

Jesus had to work as a carpenter and earn his living. Because of this, others thought of him merely as "the carpenter," or "the son of Mary." He learned to be content with his lot and to submit to his elders. In support of our conclusion that his earthly life was ordinary is the fact that his brothers did not believe in him, and his fame had not even reached the surrounding villages. Nathanael, in nearby Cana of Galilee, had not heard about him all these years, neither had the people of Capernaum or Bethsaida which were further away from Cana. The history of the life of Jesus can be summarised in what Luke the Evangelist said: "And the Child grew and became strong in spirit, filled with wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him" (Luke 2:40). These words from Luke show that Jesus developed in a natural way, and earned the favour of both God and man. We can imagine how people loved him, for he was always ready to serve them. He never hurt anyone, and repaid unkindness with love. The hour for openly confronting the forces of evil had not yet arrived. This would be at a time when Jesus' fame and prominence would incite the hatred and jealousy of the wicked and great people of his day.

## *The Boy Jesus at the Temple*

**His parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover. And when He was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem**

according to the custom of the feast. When they had finished the days, as they returned, the Boy Jesus lingered behind in Jerusalem. And Joseph and his mother did not know it; but supposing Him to have been in the company, they went a day's journey, and sought Him among their relatives and acquaintances. So when they did not find Him, they returned to Jerusalem, seeking Him. Now so it was that after three days they found Him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, both listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard Him were astonished at His understanding and answers. So when they saw Him, they were amazed; and His mother said to Him, "Son, why have You done this to us? Look, Your father and I have sought You anxiously." And He said to them, "Why is it that you sought Me? Did you not know that I must be about My Father's business?" But they did not understand the statement which He spoke to them (Luke 2:41-50).

### *Jesus Advances in Wisdom and Favour*

Then He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was subject to them, but His mother kept all these things in her heart. And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men (Luke 2:51-52).

When Jesus was twelve years old, he travelled from Nazareth to Jerusalem. Joseph, as the official head of the family, had to visit the Temple at Jerusalem every year, ideally during the Passover. Mary, and women in general, were not expected to go, and neither were boys under the age of twelve who were not yet obliged to "carry the yoke of the Law."

That year, Passover came on the eighth of Nisan (approximately April), so his parents took him to Jerusalem for the first time. It is possible to visualise the preparations for the journey as well as the journey itself which this wonderful boy took. Caravans could go one of two ways: either pass through Samaria and be exposed to violence from the Samaritans, or take the longer way, east of the river Jordan, thus crossing it twice. Pious Jews preferred the latter route. In either case, the trip to Jerusalem took four to five days.

Doubtless, Jesus must have leaped for joy at seeing the magnificient Temple and listening to the people from all parts of the world singing hymns and psalms on their way up to Jerusalem. Later, he would watch the ministry of the priests and high priests on behalf of repentant sinners and begin to appreciate their role. Every individual seeking to make his peace with God had to offer his sacrifice at the hands of these priests.

Joseph, Mary, and the boy spent their days in the city like other pilgrims, carefully attending the prayers and other Temple rituals of this Feast, especially the offerings and sacrifices. Jesus must have known that all the details of this great Feast symbolised him, the Lamb of God. He must have also been conscious that through him, all the rituals which had lasted fifteen hundred years were coming to an end. Certainly, his own spirit must have been touched with great joy and expectation to be participating, for the first time, in the ceremonies of this Feast.

All those who interacted with this boy in Jerusalem were far from realising that this was their promised Messiah. It was good that they did not know this, for had they known, they would not have let him return to Nazareth after the Feast, and consequently, he could not have been able to prepare himself for his great work.

It seems likely that Jesus kept away from his parents during that day, but this did not worry them, for they were confident of his character. He spent the day in the religious classes where the best teachers preached and taught, his only interest being to benefit and learn. He must have been amazed at the great difference between his own thinking and the superficial teachings of these great rabbis. He must have felt the great need for new spiritual instruction which would lead to true piety and upright conduct.

The feast days were over and the family travelled back to Nazareth without anyone being aware that Jesus was not in their company. He had stayed behind to listen and ask questions of the rabbis. When night came without any signs of him, his parents returned to the city very worried and upset. They looked in all the likely places but did not find him. At last, on the third day, they discovered him sitting among the scholars of their nation, having earned their respect and attention with his piercing questions and illuminating thoughts. Naturally, Mary, his mother, though relieved to find him, reprimanded him, saying, "Son, why have You done this to us? Your father and I have sought You anxiously!"

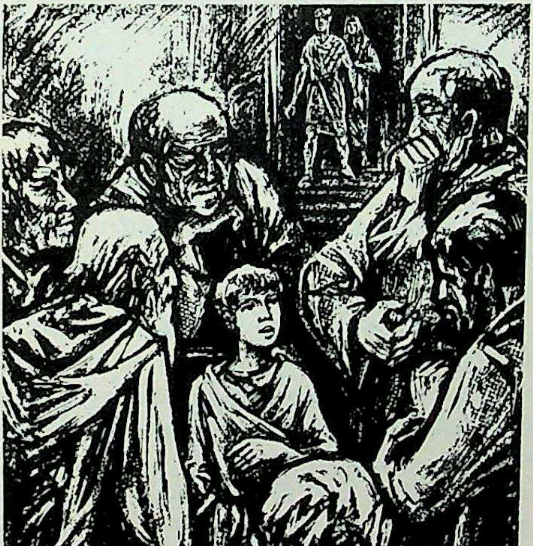
One couldn't blame any mother for acting this way in this sort of situation. However, knowing his exceptional mental and moral powers, she should have refrained from scolding him. A mild reproach was implied in his response when he said, "Did you not know that I must be about My Father's business?" He didn't apologise or ask for forgiveness. He simply stated that his work was to do the will of the Father, even before the will of his earthly parents. Joseph was not his real father. His Father was the one of whose Spirit he was born.

One should add that if he had been an ordinary boy, he would have deserved blame for his behaviour. A twelve-year-old should not normally have acted in this fashion in a strange place, and should have informed his parents that he was staying behind in Jerusalem; he also should not have answered his worried mother the way he did, implying that she was ignorant: "Did you not know that I must be about My Father's business?"

Mary was the only source of this information. It seems she had not understood exactly what her son meant, but she kept all this "in her heart." Why did she later on reveal this incident that embarrassed her? Why did Luke the Evangelist present us with the profile of a boy who appeared to have disobeyed his parents?

If we recognise that the child, as portrayed in the Gospel, was not only human but divine, we no longer have a problem. In that case, we understand his reaction to the words of his mother, "Your father and I...," for he reminded her that his Father was God and not Joseph. He was therefore under no obligation to Mary or Joseph as others would be, owing to his divine origin. From his reply, Luke the Evangelist wanted us to understand that Jesus knew that he was the Son of God, a thing that his parents perhaps did not recognise.

We should pay great attention to these words of Jesus, for they were his first recorded statement. One infers from the words, "I must be about My Father's business," a most appropriate introduction for the rest of his life. It is the principle he adopted for himself. He did not once deviate from it from the beginning of his self-awareness until he completed his life's work and ascended into heaven.



*His name is*

# *JESUS*

*because he will save*
*his people*
*from their sins.*

*Matthew 1:21*

## X

# JOHN THE BAPTIST PREPARES THE WAY

In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, and saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!" For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah, saying:

> "The voice of one crying
> in the wilderness:
> 'Prepare the way
> of the Lord,
> Make His paths straight.'"

And John himself was clothed in camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist; and his food was locusts and wild honey. Then Jerusalem, all Judea, and all the region around the Jordan went out to him and were baptized by him in the Jordan, confessing their sins. But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, "Brood of vipers! Who has warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance, and do not think to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones. And even now the ax is laid to the root of the trees. Therefore every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly purge His threshing floor, and gather His wheat into the barn; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire."

(Matthew 3:1-12)

Jesus said of himself, "I am the light of the world" (John 8:12). Before his great light appeared, the dawn broke in the person of his relative, John the Baptist, whose message was: "There comes One after me who is mightier than I, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to stoop down and loose" (Mark 1:7). This dawn, which preceded Christ's appearance, was foretold by the prophets hundreds of years before, as in Isaiah 40:3 and Malachi 3:1 and 4:5. Jesus called John "the burning and shining lamp" (John 5:35). The Apostle John said that the Baptist was a man sent from God to bear witness of Christ (John 1:8).

The rank of John the Baptist was decided first by means of these prophecies, then, by the chain of miracles which accompanied his birth, and finally, by the extraordinary power contained in his message and baptism. He quickly became the spiritual and moral authority among the Jews, their Jewish leaders, and even their wicked King, Herod Antipas. "Could this be Christ?" the Jews asked. John gained this reputation without the glorious signs which the Jews expected of the Messiah, and without even one miracle to prove his calling.

The most important support of the standing of this man, however, were the testimonies of Christ himself. Jesus spoke about him to the nation in these terms: "But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I say to you and more than a prophet. For this is he of whom it is written: ‘Behold, I send My messenger before you Who will prepare Your way before You.’ Assuredly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist; but he who is but least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he" (Matthew 11:9-11). The greatness of John was of the same kind Daniel described when he said:

**"Those who are wise**
**shall shine Like the brightness**
**of the firmament,**
**and those who turn many**
**to righteousness**

Like the stars forever and ever."
(Daniel 12:3)

John preceded Jesus in the spirit and zeal of Elijah to prepare the world for the coming of the Messiah. His ministry, like that of Elijah, was to rebuke the people of God for their deviation from his divine laws and for their yielding to corrupt influences and customs which they had acquired from the surrounding nations.

The conscience of man naturally inclines to the preacher who speaks in the spirit of the great prophets like Moses, a man who received the living oracles given to us (Acts 7:38). Peter supported this principle when, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, he said: "If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God" ( I Peter 4:11). A preacher such as John, filled with the Holy Spirit, finds multitudes of listeners. He does not engage in philosophical discourses or personal recollections. He does not preach for the sake of money, but is a communicator of the Word of God which tells him: "Now therefore go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall say" (Exodus 4:12). John the Baptist would be able to empathise with the Apostle Paul who said: "Woe is me if I do not preach the gospel!" (I Corinthians 9:16).

The parents of John the Baptist died while he was a young child. He had no brothers or sisters. When he became an adult, he did not become a priest like his father. He knew that he was to be a Nazarite. He dwelt in the desert and followed an ascetic style of life. His clothes were made of camel's hair. He wore a leather belt around his waist. He ate locusts and wild honey. He lived differently from Christ who, for thirty years, lived an ordinary human life. The story of John the Baptist, in the Gospel, does not tell us anything about his early life until he reached the age of thirty. The only mention of his life during this time comes in Luke 1:80: "So the child grew and became strong in spirit, and was in the deserts until the day of his manifestation to Israel."

In spite of the different external manners of Christ and John the Baptist, both strictly adhered to the spiritual values of life. Both were concerned only with a zeal to reform people and a boldness in speaking the truth. John was for equality among all people. He taught that the lowly will be lifted up, and the high will be made low; the uneven will be made level. He called for the way to goodnesss and heaven to be made straight, insisting all the time on repentance (Isaiah 40:4). Thus, forgiveness would not be granted at death, or after performing good deeds, but it would be a divine gift, granted immediately on repentance, driving the sinner to cast himself upon God.

No doubt, the reason for the crowds being attracted to John the Baptist was the widespread belief at the time that the coming of Christ was imminent. When John announced publicly that Christ had come, the religious fervour increased. People came to him in great numbers. However, he did not refrain from censuring them openly for their wickedness, thus confirming his credentials as a prophet; he was the "voice of one crying in the wilderness." He was merely the messenger of God with instructions for the people. The time was short and judgment would soon follow: "...the ax [was] laid to the root of the trees. Therefore every tree which [did] not bear good fruit [would be] cut down...." He warned that Christ had his winnowing fan with him to thresh out all the grain, to gather the wheat into his barn, and to burn the chaff with unquenchable fire.

This voice of the Baptist was the "voice of one crying in the wilderness." It was an echo of the peals of thunder on Sinai when the Law was given. "...Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?" he sternly asked his frightened listeners (Luke 3:7). He told them that deliverance would come by their reforming their behaviour. He assured them that being descedants of Abraham would not automatically assure them of the promised blessings of being his children because God could create children for Abraham out of stones. He could not consider a people who disregarded the righteousness of Abraham to be his descendants. The preaching of John was so effective that multitudes flocked to hear him. He had an impact on all classes of people and showed wisdom in the answers he gave to their pressing questions.

John forecasted the superior work of Christ which was to follow, and his preaching did not always arouse fear in his audience. He said that even though he baptised in water, it was a mere symbol foreshadowing the baptism of the Holy Spirit, which only God could give. In other words, he said that Christ was God, because no mere man can baptise with the Holy Spirit. When he said that Christ, who was coming after him, was also before him, he gave yet another proof that Christ was more than human.

There is no doubt that John the Baptist did pave the way for Christ because many people were prepared by his preaching to hear the teachings of Jesus and to accept them later on. He used exactly the same words that Christ himself used at the start of his public ministry, saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matthew 4:17).

God chose John the Baptist from the priestly line to prepare the way for Christ, the Saviour. He was the link between the Old and New Testaments. God raised him as a prophet and not as a priest. He made him the last of the Old Testament prophets and the first of the New Testament evangelists. God chose him from among the earthly relatives of Jesus to sanctify family relations, because the family is the basic unit of society as well as the foundation for a strong faith. Thus, the head of every family is its priest and religious leader as well. The acceptance of religion in churches and schools is related to religion being taught and made practical in the family.

The voice which rang in the desert was heard in all parts of the country. His reputation made him respected by all, including King Herod Antipas. One day, Christ came to John on the banks of the river Jordan when his thirty years of preparation had ended. The essence of his person had been concealed, but now, like a seed germinating in the ground, it was time for the truth to emerge.

### *Christ asks John to Baptise Him*

**Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan to be baptized by him. And John tried to prevent Him saying, "I have need to be baptized by You, and are You coming to me?" But Jesus answered and said to him, "Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he allowed Him. Then**

**Jesus, when He had been baptized, came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him. And suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:13-17).**

The time for the appearance of Christ had come. He was to initiate the redemption of man. He mingled with the poor in the crowd, and went to John the Baptist, asking to be baptised by him.

Jesus saw the people coming to confess their sins and to accept baptism as a sign of forgiveness. He heard the Baptist giving them good advice. He saw how the people respected John. Jesus asked to be baptised without the usual condition: confession and repentance. John was aware of Christ's holy perfection and refused to baptise him. He tried to make him change his mind, saying, "I have need to be baptized by You, and are You coming to me?" (Matthew 3:14).

John was of noble origin. He came from excellent priestly ancestry in Judea, the greatest region in the Holy Land. Even so, one need not be astonished to find him addressing Christ with humility. He knew that he was speaking to the Messiah whose advent he had proclaimed. John was meek and humble before Jesus, even though he was very stern with the Jewish leaders. On one occasion, he addressed them, saying: "Brood of vipers! Who has warned you to flee from the wrath to come?" (Matthew 3:7). How could he humble himself in front of a simple carpenter, saying that he needed to be baptised by him?

John the Baptist, despite his piety, zeal, and successful ministry, showed by these words that he knew he was a sinner. He knew he needed someone to baptise him for repentance. Such humility is proof of his greatness, for a keen sense of Sin is evidence of outstanding piety. Jesus replied with wisdom and sincerity, as a teacher speaking to his student. He said, "Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness" (Matthew 3:15).

It is worthwhile to stop and reflect on this expression since it is the first saying of Jesus as an adult that is recorded for us. From the words, "it is fitting," we understand that he wanted to be baptised, not because he needed it, but because it was the correct thing to do. Unlike the Baptist, he did not say that he needed to be baptised by him, but he submitted to this rite to encourage the ministry of John, enhance his influence among people, and encourage others to hear his preaching and ask for baptism. In this way, he would be helping John to fulfill his task of preparing the way for Christ.

John's baptising was meaningful in two ways: it was a symbol of purification from sin, and it referred to a ministry in the new kingdom which Jesus would establish, leading to a new life that those who were baptised could enjoy.

In the first sense, Christ was not baptised for his own Sin, but substitutionally and symbolically, for he took the place of every sinner when he took on himself our body of Sin; yet, he was without Sin. Like the Jewish belief that considers something pure as impure when touched by something unclean, so too Christ, when he took on a human body, was counted unclean. "He was numbered with the transgessors" (Isaiah 53:12). Thus, he shared in the baptism of repentance as our representative. The Apostle Paul said: "For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (II Corinthians 5:21).

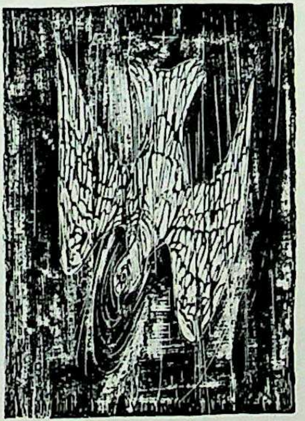
In the second sense, the setting apart for service, this baptism was applicable to Christ, for now he was entering his ministry publicly as Saviour and King of the new kingdom, establishing and ruling it. Others have entered into this new life as a result of what he has accomplished for them. The significance of this new period in the life of Christ was that he now had the authority to give new life to people. So, in his baptism, he was officially anointed as prophet, priest, and king.

After John baptised Jesus in the water, Christ came up, conscious of the importance of that hour in his earthly life and for the future of mankind. However, his thoughts dwelt on another baptism. As the Son of Man, he also needed the baptism of the Holy Spirit as a foundation for the baptism of all Christians. He emerged from the water, in total unity with the Father as he prayed. From the response he received, we can infer that he prayed for the Holy Spirit to descend on him. This actually happened when the heavens were opened and his request was granted.

It seems that John was promised a sign by which he would recognise Christ. John had said, "... He who sent me to baptize with water, said to me, 'upon whom you see the Spirit descending and remaining is He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.' And I have seen and I testified that this is the Son of God" (John 1:33,34). This promise was sufficient reason for the Holy Spirit to take the form of a dove. As soon as the Baptist saw the dove, he knew without a doubt that the man standing in front of him was the one who would come after him -- the one who was also before him and who would baptise with the Holy Spirit.

A voice was heard simultaneously with the appearance of the dove. It said, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:17). It was the first of three occasions when the voice of the Father was heard from heaven, witnessing about his Son.

With this voice, the three persons of the Trinity were present, clearly and movingly, at the consecration of the Saviour. On this basis, we find Jesus commanding his disciples to baptise all who believe in him in the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19).



# THE WORD

**BECAME FLESH**

**AND DWELT AMONG US**

**AND WE BEHELD**

# HIS GLORY

**GLORY AS OF THE ONLY**

**BEGOTTEN FROM THE FATHER**

# FULL
# OF GRACE
# AND TRUTH

**JOHN 1:14**

# XI

# QUIZ

If you have studied this book, you can answer the questions easily. Mail them to us. If you have answered at least twenty correctly, we will send you one of our books as a gift.

Please don't forget to write your full name and address clearly.

1. Why was the Law of Moses unable to reform mankind?
2. Give two reasons showing that we need Christ.
3. Write the testimony of Pilate which speaks about the perfection of Jesus.
4. In the introduction of the Gospel according to Mark, Jesus is given three titles. What are they and what is their meaning?
5. What was the profession of Luke and to whom did he write his account of the Gospel?
6. Why is the word *kalima* (logos) suitable for Jesus?
7. Why did Zacharias become mute?
8. Why does God not answer every prayer?
9. What was the first miracle that accompanied the incarnation of Christ?
10. How did the Virgin Mary become pregnant?

11. What did Joseph think of doing when he discovered that Mary was pregnant?
12. How did God explain the situation to Joseph?
13. What did the baby in Elizabeth's womb do when Mary visited her? What did it mean?
14. What was the theme of the song that Mary sang in the house of Elizabeth?
15. What made Mary and Joseph travel from Nazareth to Bethlehem before the birth of Jesus? What did it mean?
16. Why did the angels first appear to the shepherds?
17. What did Simeon prophecy would happen to Mary?
18. Write down the prophecy of the birth of Jesus. What is the reference.
19. What was the effect of the visit of the Magi on King Herod, the people of Bethlehem, and Joseph and Mary.
20. What is a possible reason for the Bible's silence about the life of Jesus between the ages of 12 and 30?
21. What may the thoughts of Jesus have been when he saw the sacrifices in the Temple of Jerusalem?
22. What do you understand by the words of Jesus: "I must be about my Father's business?"
23. State one of the things which Jesus said about John the Baptist.

24. What do you learn from Jesus saying the following words to the Baptist: "It is proper for us to fulfill all righteousness?"

25. How do we see the Holy Trinity at the time of the baptism of Jesus?

If you have any questions about the Christian faith, we will be happy to answer them for you. Do not forget to write your full name and address inside the letter as well as on the envelope.

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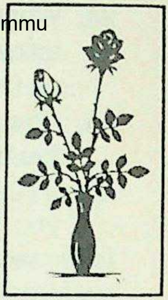
**7000 STUTTGART 10, W-GERMANY**

BLESSED
ARE THOSE WHO HEAR
THE WORD
OF GOD
AND KEEP IT
LUKE 11:28



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# THE WORD
BECAME FLESH
AND DWELT AMONG US
AND WE BEHELD
# HIS GLORY.

JOHN 1:14